

Christian Form and Christian Meaning in *Halldórs þáttr I*

Old Icelandic sources preserve two independent short stories or þættir about Halldórr Snorrason in addition to the numerous passages concerning him in *Haralds saga harðráða* and other texts. The better known of the þættir, *Halldórs þáttr II*, telling of a series of quarrels between Halldórr and King Haraldr and of Halldórr's old age, sketches an early and amusing portrait of this salty Iclander; the less well-known *Halldórs þáttr I* is almost certainly much younger, apparently exhibits a knowledge of Halldórr's character and times based partly on the earlier þáttr, and is of no historical value, being simply a fiction, a novella with historical setting.¹ From the purely literary point of view, however, *Halldórs þáttr I* is one of the most interesting and instructive of the þættir, despite its probable late date, and an analysis of the artistry with which theme here harmonizes with structure and invests it with significance—more exactly, the way *Christian meaning creates Christian form*—may be suggestive for criticism of the saga literature more generally. But we begin with structure.

For Bartlett Jere Whiting on his seventieth birthday: “opt er gott, þat er gamlir kveða” (*Hávamál*).

1. See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, ed. *Íslensk fornrit 5* (Reykjavík, 1934), where *Halldórs þáttr II* is also found; sources for Halldórr's biography are given, pp. lxxxv–xc. Sveinsson's introduction (pp. lxxxii–lxxxv) gives reasons for the dating and literary relations alluded to here and anticipates *in nuce* many of my remarks in this essay, but I believe he underestimates the literary value of the þáttr (p. lxxxii) and perhaps overestimates its historicity (pp. lxxxiv–lxxxv).

The story opens when an Icelander named Eilífr arrives in Norway and offends King Haraldr; Halldórr attempts to intercede for him and, failing to win the king over, leaves the royal court in anger. Halldórr and Eilífr remove to the estate of the powerful Norwegian nobleman Einarr þambarskelfir; there Halldórr incurs the jealousy of a disagreeable young kinsman of Einarr's named Kali, who defames and lampoons the older man. When Halldórr then kills Kali, he comes in mortal danger from Einarr, but on the advice of Einarr's wife Bergljót Halldórr surrenders to Einarr's judgment. Einarr calls an assembly but before announcing his verdict recounts an anecdote from his youth that explains his decision in the case (a separate narrative about King Óláfr Tryggvason, summarized below). Einarr's judgment is that he himself shall pay compensation for Kali's death and that he will hold the peace with Halldórr. Then Halldórr succeeds in making peace for Eilífr and himself with King Haraldr, sends Eilífr home to Iceland, and remains long afterward with the king.

A first glance suffices to show that the þáttr comprises at least two complete narratives, one within the other like Chinese boxes: Halldórr's adventures and Einarr's narration at the assembly. But when examined in the context of the six-part narrative pattern which is characteristic of a large group of þættir, *Halldórs þáttr I* appears to be composed of four narrative structures, three with the Alienation/Reconciliation pattern common to the group and the fourth the tale told by Einarr.² The outermost structure concerns Eilífr and King Haraldr, the second Halldórr and Haraldr, the third Halldórr and Einarr, and the inmost Einarr's recollections of King Óláfr Tryggvason, and these strands are related in a manner similar to that of syntactic “nesting structures.” The relationship between Halldórr and Einarr replicates closely that between Eilífr and Haraldr, both having not only the common Alienation/Reconciliation structure but, in addition to the two essential role positions or “slots,” also a third that is often found in þættir of this type, the intercessor (Halldórr as intercessor for Eilífr, and Bergljót for

2. I have discussed the pattern, in which “alienation” and “reconciliation” form the central structural segments, in “Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga þættir*,” *Scandinavian Studies*, 44 (1972), 1–27, and “The King and the Icelander: A Study in the Short Narrative Forms of Old Icelandic Prose,” Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1969.

Halldórr). The relationship between Halldórr and Haraldr is quite similar, but no third person functions as intercessor.³

This analysis seems confirmed by the elegant and economical ending of the þáttur where the last three sentences knit up the three outer narrative strands. The opening of the þáttur had presented the Alienations in the order Eilífr/Haraldr, Halldórr/Haraldr, and Halldórr/Einarr (1, 2, 3); in the closing passage the inmost of these feuds is settled first (3); in the second sentence both the Halldórr/Haraldr and Eilífr/Haraldr feuds are composed, not in the expected order 2, 1, the mirror image of their introduction, but in the order 1, 2. Then the third and last sentence, which concerns only Eilífr and Haraldr, arrives to establish the pattern 1, 2, 3:3, (1), 2, 1, an instance of the aesthetic formula of establishing a strong presumption of a pattern, first violating it, and finally fulfilling it. The þáttur's last sentence, so untypical of saga conclusions,⁴ is also remarkable for giving essential information that was withheld at the beginning of the story: we learn only in the last sentence that Eilífr's offense had been killing a courtier of King Haraldr's. This belated information, dropping into place like the keystone of an arch, has the effect of drastically underlining the parallelism between Eilífr's story and Halldórr's. Authorial control of the reader and suspense of a sort extend literally to the last sentence, and by dramatically emphasizing the equivalence of two of the story's personal ratios (Eilífr : Haraldr :: Halldórr : Einarr), it "lays bare the device" (in the famous Russian Formalist phrase) and stimulates the reader's mind to seek the thematic relevance of the story's form.

Framed within the Alienation/Reconciliation structures, a story within the stories, we find Einarr's retrospective narrative: Björn, an old man, Kolbeinn, who was in middle life, and Einarr, aged eighteen, shipmates aboard the famous Long Serpent, were captured by Danes in the general defeat at the Battle of Svöldr after King Óláfr Tryggvason had "disap-

3. Typical *dramatis personae* of these stories are discussed in "King and Iclander," pp. 151-167. In *Flateyjarbók* (Reykjavík, 1944) I, 562, the story is headed "Einarr hjálpaði Halldóri," as if the copyist were completing the analogies among the three pairs of antagonists.

4. Usual endings of such þættir are discussed in "King and Iclander," pp. 76-80 and p. 260, n.13. The three principal texts of the þáttur (F, S, and B) are, I think, similar enough to warrant this detailed commentary, though, of course, the punctuation of the last three sentences is editorial; on F₂ see Sveinsson, pp. lxxxii-lxxxiii, n.1.

peared in the light that shined over him”; they were kept bound in a wood to be sold as slaves. At the slave market a man in a blue cloak like a monk’s and masked bargained with the slave master for the three and finally purchased them. As he led them away on a forest path, Einarr asked his name, but the stranger refused to tell. Then he predicted their lives: Björn had not long to live and should make disposition of his property for his soul’s sake; Kolbeinn would be highly esteemed at home; but Einarr would be the greatest. And from Einarr the hooded man required repayment for buying and freeing them: Einarr was laid under obligation to free a man who had offended against him, even though his enemy should stand fully in his power. The stranger lifted his mask as he distracted the three by pointing, and when they looked back, he had disappeared. But they recognized him as Óláfr Tryggvason.

This reminiscence is introduced into the þáttir as an “entertainment” offered at the assembly:

Ok þenna sama dag stefnir Einarr fjölmennt þing. Hann stóð upp á þinginu ok talaði svá: ”Ek vil nú skemmta yðr ok segja frá því...” (P. 255)

That same day Einarr called an assembly that was heavily attended. He stood up in the meeting and spoke as follows: “I mean to entertain you now by telling about ...”

But its real integrative principle is explained in Einarr’s closing words:

“Nú em ek skyldr til,” segir Einarr, “at gera þat, er Óláfr konungr bað mik. Sýnisk mér nú eigi annat líkara, Halldórr, en hann hafi fyrir þér beðit, því at þú ert nú á mínu valdi.” (P. 260)

“Now I am obligated,” said Einarr, “to do what King Óláfr asked of me. Nothing seems more likely to me now, Halldórr, than that he was asking it for your sake since you are now in my power.”

Mere entertainment is unmasked as the motivating principle of the remainder of the þáttir.⁵

5. Cf. the ostensible and real motivation for the tale-within-a-tale in *Morkinskinna*’s story about Úlfr inn auðgi (ed. C. R. Unger [Christiania, 1867], pp. 66–69): at a feast King Haraldr proposed to enliven the occasion with a story (*ræða*) and at the end made the application to his own immediate situation, motivating his ensuing actions.

It should be clear by now that our author's aesthetic sense is strongly symmetrical. The triple Alienation/Reconciliation structures and the retrospective speech are neatly "self-embedded"; the causal principle operates from outer to inner structures and out again from inner to outer: Eilífr's offense causes Halldórr's separation from the king, which leads to his presence at Einarr's and the resulting feud, the assembly, and the "entertainment"; that tale motivates Einarr's reconciliation with Halldórr, which (I shall argue below) leads to Halldórr's reunion with the king, in turn a necessary condition for Eilífr's reconciliation to Haraldr. The triple arrangement of the Alienation/Reconciliation structures suggests that the same action is being replicated at different social levels. Thus the sequence—king vs. otherwise unknown Iclander (Eilífr), king vs. famous Iclander from a great family (Halldórr),⁶ great nobleman vs. famous Iclander from a great family—seems to be arranged in descending order of social distance between the antagonists. More obvious is the triple arrangement and gradation of the comrades in Einarr's tale: Björn is old, Kolbeinn evidently middle-aged, Einarr young; their prices as slaves are graded from Björn through Kolbeinn to Einarr (respectively one, two, and three marks); and in the prophecy Björn is told to make his peace with God in preparation for imminent death, while Einarr is to live to a ripe and powerful old age (Kolbeinn being somewhere between).

The most important structural feature (also manifesting a kind of symmetry) of the central "entertainment" leads from discussion of form to theme. Einarr's reminiscence has a symbolic dimension and is, more specifically, a figural or typological narrative. There should be nothing surprising in this since Óláfr Tryggvason was in popular conception very nearly a saint, and every saint's life is to some extent a typological recapitulation of Christ's, an *imitatio Christi*; what is remarkable is to find typology so well integrated into typical themes and structures of the saga literature. But first the details of the typology must be examined.

Svöldr is Óláfr's last, great *agon*, and like Christ his "death" here is ambiguous; like Enoch and Elijah, Óláfr is taken mysteriously while yet alive, and those prophets were interpreted as types of Christ in the manner

6. Cf. *Halldórs þáttur II* on Halldórr's pride of family (*ÍF* 5, 269 and 273).

of their passing.⁷ After three days Christ rose from the dead and came to his disciples, just as Óláfr comes to Einarr and his companions (members of Óláfr's crew, his "disciples") after some time; the interval between the battle and Óláfr's "epiphany" cannot be calculated exactly, but there can be no doubt that the author wished to make the parallel clear since he contrives to mention the number three in connection with this time period:

"ok Danir, menn Sveins konungs, tóku oss ok færðu konungi, en hann flutti oss til Jótlands, ok váru vér þar upp leiddir ok settir á eina lág ok þar fjöttraðir ... ok í þeim skógi sátu vér þrjár nætr." (P. 256)

"And the Danes, the men of King Sveinn, captured us and led us to their king, and he brought us to Jutland, and there we were led ashore, seated on a log, and fettered.... And we sat three nights in that forest."⁸

The effect of Christ's victory over death was the *redemption* or "buying back" of mankind, and imagery of commerce, of slavery, and of bondage is commonplace in this connection; thus Óláfr returned from "death" to purchase his men literally out of thralldom and to release them literally from bondage.⁹ Christ was not recognized by his disciples when he appeared to them after the resurrection; so the disguised Óláfr is not recognized at first by his men.

7. Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2:1-12 (cf. also Romulus, Ovid, *Met.* IV.816ff.). The translations of Enoch and Elijah were usually viewed as figuring Christ's Ascension (e.g., J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* CIX, col. 222-223), which does not fit the action schema of Óláfr's story perfectly, but the eclecticism of my typological interpretation has precedent in medieval methods of composition and interpretation.

8. See W. Baetke, "Das Svoldr-Problem," *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig*. Philological-historical class, vol. 98 (1951), pt. 6, pp. 59-135; if our author thought the battle site near Jutland, he may have meant the interval to be exactly three days, but general Icelandic tradition favored the coast of Pomerania, while the other major tradition, locating it in the Öresund, was Danish. A third location at the Schlei in Schleswig-Holstein would place it near Jutland, but it seems quite impossible that our author belongs to this questionable tradition (Baetke, pp. 59-60) in spite of the fact that he does not name the place "Svöldr" in the Icelandic manner; Jutland is probably chosen simply as a forbidding place deep in enemy country. With the image of captives fettered and sitting along a log; cf. the Jómsvíkings (ÍF 26, 284). The word *lág* seems to be old; it is used here by Snorri, glossed twice in his *Edda*, and used once in *Egils saga*; cf. n.10 below.

9. The Harrowing of Hell, a mythic elaboration of the idea of redemption, has only general relevance here; but cf. Jesus' words (from Isaiah): "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed ..." (Luke 4:18).

These parallels will be sufficient for the moment to establish a figural relation between aspects of the death and resurrection of Christ and Óláfr's role in our þáttur, though a few qualifications are in order. Óláfr's disappearance into a cloud of light and some other features of Einarr's tale are traditional, not invented by our author, and other stories do attribute supernatural powers to Óláfr Tryggvason;¹⁰ nevertheless, most of the elements of the story and their constellation as a narrative whole must be credited to him, and in view of the Christian parallels offered so far, both the general and the specific, I think it would "outrage probability" to consider this pattern accidental (R. E. Kaske's criterion). The þáttur's style is "saga realism," and in accord with that peculiar brand of realism the author clothes his figural narrative in the possible if unlikely theory that Óláfr Tryggvason escaped from the battle and lived on as a monk in a distant land; and the stage business at the slave market, the mask and hood, and the sheer weight of mundane detail in these scenes lend further plausibility. But Óláfr's role in the story is supernatural—Sveinsson commented that if the king had survived the battle he would have had better things to do than hang about in his enemy's country—and scarcely to be understood from a purely realistic point of view, without its figural schema and function in the semantic configurations of the þáttur. In short, the author of *Halldórs þáttur I* was not interested in presenting a version of either of the realistic theories of Óláfr's end for its own sake but instead in the king as instrument and spokesman for God and as *deus ex machina* in the realistic human drama of enmity and reconciliation that he laid in Norway.¹¹

10. Sveinsson places the þáttur in the general tradition of the Óláfr sagas of Oddr and Gunnlaugr (p. lxxxi). In Oddr (ed. Finnur Jónsson [Copenhagen, 1932]) the author could have found the light, the names of Einarr, Kolbeinn, and Björn in close proximity as three of the first four named as survivors (identities of Kolbeinn or Kolbjörn and Björn discussed by Sveinsson, pp. 255–256, n.3), the fact that the survivors jumped overboard and were captured, that Óláfr lived on, became a monk, and was seen by certain witnesses. But he may have had recourse to Snorri's version for the information that Einarr was eighteen (*ÍF* 26, 346) and about the legal ages of the crew (p. 344; Sveinsson, p. 256, n.2); cf. n.8 above.

11. Tradition, represented by Oddr, actually reports *three* versions of Óláfr's end: disappearance in light, normal death of wounds or drowning but in unspecified circumstances, escape by swimming to a Wendish ship; the latter two are not only realistic but related, while the first is quite separate. See Lars Lönnroth, "Studier i Olaf Tryggvasons saga," *Sammlaren*, 84 (1963), 54–94, for discussion of the sources of the realistic escape legend.

On this basis we may look for some more questionable parallels of detail. In the gospels Christ appears unrecognized three times, in Luke 24, John 20:14–16, and John 21:4; of these the epiphany on the road to Emmaus is most similar, and the parallels are extensive: the epiphany occurs out of doors, on a path, to only a small number (two) of disciples; Christ instructs them before he disappears; they recognize him just as he vanishes from their sight; after Christ has disappeared the men talk about the epiphany (“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road...”); then they return to Jerusalem. Similarly Óláfr leads his three men, a small portion of his crew,¹² down a forest path, instructs them about their future life, and is recognized fully by all only in the moment of his vanishing; afterward the men discuss the event and return to Norway.

One curious feature of the þáttir is possibly to be explained as a confused or, better, imaginatively altered imitation of the passage from Luke: The hooded man and the companions reach a clearing, and they catch a glimpse under his hood: “kipaði upp lítt at hettinum” (p. 258) (“he pulled up a little on the hood”). After his prophecy they get a closer look: “Ok at svá tǫluðu lypti kuflmaðrinn grímu frá andliti sér” (p. 259) (“And this said, the cowed man raised the mask from his face”). At the same time he distracted them, and:

“er vér litum aptr, var grímumaðr horfinn, ok síðan sáam vér hann aldri. En þenna man kenndu vér allir fullgǫrla, at þetta var Óláfr konungr Tryggvason, því at þegar fyrri sinn, at hann lypti kuflshettinum, kennda ek hann fyrir víst; en síðan hann lypti upp grímunni ok sýndi oss sína ásjónu, kenndu vér hann allir.” (P. 259)

“When we looked back, the masked man had disappeared, and we never saw him again. But we all recognized the man quite clearly: it was King Óláfr Tryggvason. For as soon as he pushed back his hood the first time, I was certain I recognized him; but after he raised up his mask and showed us his face, we all recognized him.”

12. The þáttir says nine survived from the Long Serpent; Oddr says eight but gives only seven names; conceivably Oddr’s “eight” derives from the seven named crewmen plus Óláfr and the þáttir’s “nine” in the same way from Oddr’s “eight.”

It is strange that, having recognized Óláfr “for sure” the first time he gave a glimpse of himself, Einarr did not call him by name, give the Good News to his comrades, and “lay hands on him” as the three afterward agreed they should have done (pp. 259–260); instead Einarr waited for the final revelation with his two companions and only tells us after it is all over that he had known from that first glimpse. This is perhaps to be related to the fact that, while Luke states clearly that Jesus appeared to two disciples on the way to Emmaus, he also mentions an earlier epiphany to a single disciple: “And they [the two from Emmaus] rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!’ Then they [the two from Emmaus] told what had happened on the road ...” (24:33–35). Thus the Emmaus passage as a whole mentions three individual disciples (Cleophas, one unnamed, and Simon) as witnesses of Christ’s return and seems to make the epiphany to Simon prior to that to the two on the road to Emmaus; in *Halldórs þáttir I* we have Óláfr’s appearance to three followers but to one a little before the other two.

Perhaps this explanation is not necessary, but in addition to the questions posed above about the logicity of Einarr’s actions judged from purely a realistic perspective, we must explain why, after the first glimpse when he knew with certainty that the stranger was Óláfr Tryggvason, Einarr nevertheless claimed not to know him: “Ek svaraða, at óhægra væri at launa, ef ek vissi eigi, hverjum at gjalda var” (p. 259) (“I answered that it was very difficult to repay a man if I didn’t know who was to be repaid”). It is possible, of course, that Einarr was boasting untruthfully when he said he had recognized the king before the other two or that the author imagined Einarr as having some unexpressed reasons for not making known his discovery immediately and for saying he did not know whom to reward—possible, but as it seems certain that the author had the Luke text in mind, it is at least a likely hypothesis that the illogicality or at least lack of realistic motivation in Einarr’s actions here is caused by the imitation or, with Frye, “displacement.”

This argument is not damaged by a series of striking if unsystematic agreements with John 21 where the risen Christ, at first not recognized, reveals himself to eight disciples beside the Sea of

Tiberias and breakfasts with them (21:1–14). He then makes a speech (15–19) with strongly marked tripartite form (“Simon, son of John ... Simon, son of John ... Simon, son of John”; cf. “En þú, Björn ... En þú Kolbeinn ... En þú, Einarr ...”); the climactic third part is longest and most developed (as with Óláfr’s speech). The speech is given before the group but addresses an individual (as Óláfr addresses each of his men individually, and especially Einarr) and treats a commandment (thrice repeated) as an obligation (“do you love me? ... Feed my sheep”; cf. Óláfr’s injunction of forgiveness as the obligatory requital for freedom given). Besides the commandment the speech includes prophecy of Peter’s old age and death (Óláfr prophesies Björn’s death and Einarr’s prosperous old age), and Jesus’ words about Peter’s life oppose youth and old age, suggesting the contrast between Einarr and Björn. Finally, an arresting detail: Peter is evidently singled out for the commandment and prophecy here *because* he stands out above the other disciples (“Simon, son of John, do you love me *more than these*? ... Feed my lambs”; cf. Peter’s individual actions in 21:7–8 and 11), while Óláfr sets Einarr apart in prophecy and selects him alone for his commandment because Einarr excels the others.¹³ If, then, it seems reasonable to say that Einarr’s role reflects to some extent Simon Peter’s position in John 21, the probability of the same influence from the epiphany to “Simon” in Luke 24:34 seems to gain support.

Figural narrative can be considered a structural device in that a pattern of events is made or seen to conform to that of a part of

13. Pp. 257–258, esp. 259: “En þú, Einarr ... munt verða yðvar mestr maðr ... af þér einum mun ek laun hafa ... því at þér einum hygg ek at mest þykki vert, ef þú ert eigi þræll” (“‘But you, Einarr ... will become the greatest man of the three ... from you alone I must have repayment ... because I think you place the most value on not being a slave’”). An ambiguity in the Vulgate’s “diligis me *plus his*?” is reflected in the English translation; the interpretation here is the most natural in context. The John 21 passage includes also “Follow me” (19 and 22; cf. the þáttir, p. 258 and below). Other texts that may have contributed: John 21:12: “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared ask him, ‘Who are you?’ They knew it was the Lord” (cf. p. 258: “gekk þá brott ... ok það fylgja sér ... spurða ek hann at nafni. Hann svarar: ‘Ekki varðar þik at vita nafn mitt ...’”); John 20:17: “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father,’” and other passages about touching the risen Christ, John 20:27 and Luke 24:39 (cf. pp. 259–260: “töluðum vár í milli, at oss hefði mjök óvitrliga til tekizk er vér höfðum eigi hendr á honum ...”); with Óláfr’s directives to his “disciples,” esp. Einarr, cf. Matthew 28:18–20 (the risen Christ’s charge to the apostles); Luke 4:29–30 may perhaps be compared with the final disappearance.

sacred history,¹⁴ but an examination of the *effects* of typology takes us out of formal analysis and into the realm of theme, the semantics of a narrative; in *Halldórs þáttur I* the typology associates Óláfr with Christ, lending his words a deeper resonance which perhaps only grows on the reader as he gradually realizes that Óláfr here is a type of Christ. Most obviously, of course, the dialogue dealing with purchase and sale takes on symbolic force, but perhaps also the harsh slave master (*meistari*) suggests the death to which mankind had been subject before Christ's redeeming victory. (Note that, like the hooded stranger in this scene, the *meistari* is identified only by his words and actions, an anonymity which increases his symbolic potential.) The universal ring of some of Óláfr's words and an irony (beyond that occasioned by the motif of the king in disguise) in his bargaining become explicable against the figural pattern (are men worthy of redemption?), and the syntactic and lexical balance between the expressions of the *meistari*'s relation to the prisoners and Óláfr's, which cannot be accidental, takes on significance:

“En sá, er oss varðveitti, *vildi selja* oss í þrældóm; hann hét oss afarkostum ok limaláti, *ef vér vildim eigi þjásk*.” (P. 256)

“‘eru menn takmiklir, *ef þeir vilja mennask; sýnisk mér því ráð at kaupa þá alla*.’” (P. 258)

“The one who was guarding us meant to sell us into slavery; he threatened us with rough treatment and mutilation if we would not submit to being slaves.”

“‘they will be strong if they are willing to act like men [or even: men will be strong ...]; so it seems to me a good idea to buy them all.’”

The conventional symbolism of “forest” and “night” in Christian thought may go some way toward creating the reverberations of “í þeim skógi sátu vér þrjár nætr” and to explaining why in a *merely* realistic fiction (in fiction an author has control of what he says and does

14. This is not intended as a definition of typology, and no general treatment will be attempted here; see Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. W. Hibberd (London: Burns’ Dates, 1960), and Charles Donahue, “Patristic Exegesis: Summation,” in *Critical Approaches to Medieval Literature*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 62–66 and *passim*.

not say) an assembly or market is called in an unnamed forest vaguely located in Jutland. Christian-symbolic ideas associated with “path” may also lend overtones that go beyond geography when Óláfr leads his men away from the slave market and, showing them the “path” to safety, immediately adds directives for the future lives of his freedmen.

Finally, of course, comes Óláfr’s injunction to Einarr:

“Því skaltu launa: ef nokkurr maðr gerir svá mjök í móti þér, at fyrir hvatvetna vilir þú hafa hans líf, ok hafir þú vald yfir honum, þá skaltu eigi minna frelsi gefa honum en ek gef nú þér.” (P. 259)

“Here is the way you must repay me: if some man offends you so much that you want to take his life and you have him in your power, you must give him no less freedom than I have now given you.”

In this way Einarr (and mankind) must repay the “gift of life and freedom” (“laun ... fyrir lífgjöfina ok frelsit,” p. 259); Óláfr is not only enjoining upon Einarr the practice of forgiving an enemy but imagining a situation similar to Einarr’s own predicament as a slave, thus an exemplification of the golden rule in a saga-specific form: if Einarr should one day find himself with power over an enemy, he shall act in imitation of the redeemer Óláfr/Christ and not identify himself with the forces of the *meistari*/death. More precisely, the imagined situation explicitly predicts the relationship between Halldórr and Einarr and by extension that between the other feuding pairs, giving the “correct solution” to any Alienation/Reconciliation story.

With this injunction we have arrived at the structural and moral heart of *Halldórs þáttur I*. This teaching of Óláfr’s is now applied to Einarr’s grievance against Halldórr and in turn to the feuds between the Icelanders and King Haraldr. The text, of course, simply juxtaposes Einarr’s final words, quoted above, and his exemplary action with the reconciliation to King Haraldr and leaves the reader to imagine how it came about. As so often the saga literature presents us with the “half-sung song,” but how *did* Halldórr reconcile himself and Eilífr with the king? Must we not imagine that he recounted Einarr’s story, which applies to the situation of Eilífr almost as well as that of Halldórr, or at least that in some unspecified way Óláfr’s teaching is extended to King Haraldr? (If Einarr can forbear revenge for his relative, cannot Haraldr do the

same for his unnamed courtier?) This not very bold assumption allows further details to be integrated as thematically functional: Halldórr's first attempt to intercede in Eilífr's behalf is impetuous and demanding and results in an extension of the royal disfavor to himself and indirectly in his feud with Einarr; however, after hearing Óláfr's precept and profiting by Einarr's example, Halldórr succeeds in making peace with Haraldr; Bergljót's initial advice that Halldórr throw himself on Einarr's mercy led ultimately to the settlement, but she appears at the assembly with an armed force ready to fight against her own husband for her protégé Halldórr—just as Einarr is rendering his generous and peaceful decision. The story as a whole, of course, recommends conciliatory attitudes, but with the details of these attempts at intercession the author seems to be making a further statement: human mediation is not necessarily effective; if attempted in the wrong spirit it may cause further trouble (Halldórr's first attempt) or appear absurd in the face of Christian charity (Bergljót with her armed men); to have any effect at all peacemakers must proceed in humility and moderation (Bergljót's advice),¹⁵ but to be finally blessed with success they must also be imbued with Christian intent, a reflex of divine directive (Einarr's exemplum and its effects).

The texture of the narrative in *Halldórs þátr I* is denser in the center, in Einarr's tale, and thinner, less circumstantial, as we move outward: much is told about Halldórr's conflict with Einarr but very little about that of King Haraldr and the Icelanders. This stylistic gradation seems associated with the fact that the theme of the þátr is expressed most explicitly in Einarr's tale, and triplication of the Alienation/Reconciliation structure could be seen simply as a kind of "redundancy" that insures communication.¹⁶ But the meaning of even didactic literature is not the same as "information," and a better

15. Bergljót's advice is here simplified for the legitimate purpose of bringing out the chiasmic pattern; the point to be emphasized is that her advice is sensible (in contrast to Halldórr's worse-than-useless attempt to mediate for Eilífr) but not religiously motivated and so incomplete without Einarr's story of Óláfr.

16. Richard F. Allen, *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njáls saga* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971), pp. 47–48, also connects stylistic density with didactic intent, though I disagree about what is taught. (Didactic aims are likely to be ethical, religious, and social, but hardly tactical or strategic.) For two interesting comments on structural replication in myth see Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke G. Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 229 (Formalist view), and Edmund R. Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Cape, 1969), pp. 7–9 (information theory).

view is that the teaching of forgiveness and reconciliation takes effect in concentric circles, widening out from Óláfr’s precept and passing through the story’s three degrees of social relations; thus the thematic function of triplication may not be mere redundancy but a way of saying that reconciliation is a value that should be carried through these three, hence all social relations. Similarly the three comrades, Björn the old man, Kolbeinn the middle-aged man, and Einarr the youth, suggest three ages of man in general and make Óláfr’s words apply to everyman, including the medieval audience.

Other aspects of the art of this *þáttur* might be mentioned. Item: the didactic note struck when Einarr stifles his first instincts for revenge, foreshadowing the peaceful outcome and crystalizing the ethical-religious dilemma of reconciliation or revenge, and, like the final settlement, supported by a near saintly royal precept (p. 254). Item: the three examples of *sagnaskemtan* or “saga-telling for amusement” that grade off from good to evil: Einarr’s implicitly religious “entertainment”; Halldórr’s worldly heroic tales; and Kali’s malicious satire “in prose and verse,” especially his parody of Halldórr’s Byzantine adventures. (Is it oversubtle to add as a fourth Óláfr’s divinely sanctioned “sermon” and to compare the narrative structures of the *þáttur* as a whole?) Item: the choice of setting and persons, Haraldr, Einarr, and Halldórr, for the tale (compare their historical relationships and characters); conceivably even the numbers in the story and the naming of the presumably invented character Eilífr. But perhaps enough has already been said to make my point about Christian form and Christian meaning: *Halldórs þáttur I* embodies the theme of reconciliation in rather simple but skillfully articulated narrative structures that function intimately in the meaning of the story.

No ringing declarations will be risked here on the basis of one possibly isolated short story; however, few works of art are entirely *sui generis*. *Halldórs þáttur I* shows how intricately a “standard” generic form may be varied and related to theme and suggests semantic functions for structural replications and for the familiar saga aesthetic of symmetry. Formal typology is not to be expected as a widespread saga convention, of course, and I know of no exactly comparable case; however, this *þáttur* does suggest that some aspects of the allegorical sensibility in general and some of its techniques as found elsewhere in medieval literature may not be totally alien to the authors of

ostensibly secular sagas. Like this story, most þættir and family sagas are built on conflicts manifested in violent actions and proud passions, but most end in reconciliation and restoration of social balance. However, the question posed for the family sagas by such a story as *Halldórs þáttir I* is rather how far the conciliatory values of the sagas are to be seen in specifically religious light and how a putative religious ethic is there artistically integrated with material partly transmitted by a secular tradition. Finally, the clarity of the didactic intention in the art of *Halldórs þáttir I* may partly be due to the *projective force* immanent in Christian typology, which views history as unfinished but divinely patterned, but it poses the question whether more sagnaskemtán than only that of Einarr þambarskelfir may not reveal itself in the fullness of time as directly relevant to Christian conduct. The Christian interpretation of the saga literature, despite brave hopes of a decade ago, seems now bogged down, and I suggest that if we are to realize the full consequences of the literary nature of our subject—to reap where Nordal sowed—the pot will have to be set boiling again.

